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THE ENDINGS *ATE* AND *OTE* IN SPANISH WORDS OF MEXICAN ORIGIN

The grammar of the Academy, Sec. 182, sub -ote, -ota, says: "Despectivo, con valor aumentativo o diminutivo, en nombres y adjetivos: islote y picota, de isla y pica; barbarote y blancote, de bárbaro y blanco. *Otros nombres con esta terminación son mejicanos, como camote, cayote, etc.—Véase, etc.*"

Can it be possible that the Academy intends that the eager student shall believe that -ote is a suffix occurring in Nahuatl or in Spanish words derived therefrom? Evidently sufijo and terminación are used interchangeably in the part of the grammar concerned, since in the same article under ulento, olento, we read: "De esta terminación (ulento, olento) procede el sufijo iento, que vemos en calenturiento, mugriento, etc., de calentura, mugre, etc."

The matter is made very clear indeed by a comparison with the entry under -ate in the same article, which reads: "En voces de origen mejicano, como chocolate, tomate, etc., y en pocos derivados, de nombres de frutos casi todos, denotando material: almendrate y uvate de almendra y uva."

Quite evidently both -ate and -ote are, then, according to the Academy, *suffixes* that occur in words of Nahuatl origin, since the examples given deal with Nahuatl or "mexicano" par excellence.

Most Nahuatl nouns and adjectives standing in absolute construction, i. e., without limiting pronominal prefixes either alone or forming the last member in an agglutination, regularly have an ending containing the characteristic *tl* with a preceding or following *i* vowel. According to phonetic laws this is reduced on occasion to a simple *li* or to *tl*. Thus *cactli*, *maïtl* and *calli* are the absolute forms of the words *cac*, *ma*, and *cal*. If the word ends in a vowel usually the *i* either is suppressed or appears at the end of the word, thus *huexolo* forms *huexolotl*, *mizqui* forms *mizquitl*, *axolo* forms *axolotl* and *toma* forms *tomatl*. In the construct position, however, the words appear in their true form, e. g., *mizquicopalli*, *mohuexolo*.

When a Spaniard asked the name of an object in Nahuatl the answer, being a single word unlimited by prefixes or agglutination, would, of course, stand in the absolute form. If a Spaniard caught an armadillo and asked the native name the answer would naturally

be ayotochtli, not ayotoch, although the place where the animal was found might be ayotochcalli.

Thus loan words in Castilian or *aztequismos*, would usually be taken from the absolute form, the process being so universal that by analogy absolutes were formed which never existed in the native language. Cf. Robelo's *Diccionario de Aztequismos* sub *Ahuehuete*.

But the sound of *tl* is inconvenient if not difficult for Europeans, and a conventional change was soon adopted, such words as *teule*, *petate* and *chalchihuete* appearing even in Cortés' letters and in Bernal Díaz' *Verdadera Historia*. This simplification of the *tl* ending to *te* or *le* gave *metate*, from *metlatl*, *coyote*, from *coyotl*, *mezquite*, from *mizquitl*, *teule*, from *teotl*, and *chocolate*, from *chocolatl*.

The Academy in speaking of *ate* and *ote* as suffixes, or even as terminaciones, is in error, as far as words of Nahuatl origin are concerned. Words may end in these letters, but there are two elements in the ending, the *a* or the *o* belong to the root of the words concerned, while the *te* belongs to any noun whose phonetic combination makes the addition possible. The Academy has made as absurd a mistake as it would have made if it had stated that *nista* is a formative suffix of the Castilian language because such words as *accionista* and *alcoranista* have this *terminación*.

Does the Academy mean to sponsor such strange hybrid children as Greek-Nahuatl *almendrate*, Latin-Nahuatl *uvate*, and Arabic-Nahuatl *azanoriate*?

The almond and the carrot are exotic and their Spanish names were actually taken into the language of the natives, assuming on occasion the Nahuatl absolute termination, in which case *almendratl*¹ and *çanahoriatl* (more commonly *caxtillan camotli*) is the absolute form, but with no more connotation of "materia" than the construct forms *almendra* and *çanahoria*. The grape, however, was well known to the Aztecs and their name therefor has persisted down to the year 1922. How "uva" could have assumed a Nahuatl dress is amazing, since the Castilian had no need of an absolute ending and no Aztec was ever guilty of telling a Spaniard that the fruit was "uvatl" or "uvatli."

The principal "derivados, de nombres de frutos . . . denotando materia" are the following (all of which denote some sweet): *Almendrate*, *azanahoriate*, *azanoriate*, *calabacinate*, *calabazate*, *higate*,

¹The absence of sonants and *r* in Nahuatl make these words difficult of pronunciation, but Molina himself vouches for one of them.

piñonate, and zanahoriате. Of these higate and calabazate, with its variant, could never have been Nahuatl. The fig is not indigenous and the Mexicans adopted as its name the hispanism *hicox* (singular and plural alike because inanimate) which did not admit absolute ending. Calabaza has never been taken into good Nahuatl society, since there is an abundance of native words therefor. The treatment of these loan words in the American language is in no way different from that of others, and sweets made from figs, almonds and carrots were *tzopelic* just as were those of *camote* in the days of *Axayacatl*. Moreover the candies made from *nochtli* (tuna) are not *nochate*, although tuna sweets are as old as the Toltecs, and the stew of *guajes* that might be called *calabazate* is never *guajate*. The alleged “*mejicano*” suffix does not go with words from Nahuatl and the origin of *-ate* must be sought in the form of the southern Romance participle or in the Arabic formative suffixes of such words as “*sharbat*,” and “*ʿawlayat*” and “*malakut*”; certainly Toltec culinary terms afford us no aid.

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